

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 12, 2017

Agenda Item: Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease Renewals

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

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Background:

Beginning in 1991, a rest-rotation cattle grazing system was established on the 2,120-acre south pasture of Ear Mountain WMA (EMWMA) to enhance the availability of quality native forage for wildlife. In 1992, a similar rest-rotation grazing system was established for the 960-acre north pasture. Year-round and seasonal forage for mule deer and bighorn sheep has been enhanced and structural diversity of vegetation for a variety of wildlife has been accomplished through the use of grazing. Public hunting access on the lessee's property has also been incorporated within the grazing leases. FWP proposes renewing each of these leases for a period of two years.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

In August 2017, FWP Region 4 issued a draft environmental assessment (EA) and solicited public comment for a 22-day period for the proposed renewal of EMWMA grazing leases. Five public comments were received, three in favor of the Proposed Action, one with concerns regarding public access on the lessee's properties, and one with a variety of other concerns. Based on these public comments and given the scope of the EA, pertinent modifications to the draft EA were completed. The revised EA along with the stipulations outlined in the Decision Notice were considered final, contingent on Commission approval. The north pasture lease generates less than \$5,000 revenue so technically this lease does not require Commission approval, however, given the scope of the EA, it is included here.

Alternatives and Analysis:

The No Action alternative would not renew grazing leases on EMWMA. Over time, forage quality (palatability) for mule deer and bighorn sheep would decline and the diversity of cover and associated attractiveness by different wildlife species would be reduced. The lessees would be required to find additional grazing pasture elsewhere. The lessees would not be required to allow public hunting access on their properties. FWP would continue to manage EMWMA for the benefit of wildlife and public access.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends implementing the described 2-year rest/rotation grazing cycle on the WMA. The proposed grazing leases would continue to use cattle grazing as a management tool for improving forage and cover characteristics while also benefiting local producers with additional early and late summer pasture for their cattle. The leases would help continue good relations with local ranchers/neighbors while also providing additional public hunting opportunities on their private ranches.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission renew the (2) Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area rotational grazing system leases for the 2018–2019 period.